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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 001036

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SUBJECT: ISTANBUL DEPUTY GOVERNOR TOES PARTY LINE WITH
ARCHONS OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

REF: A. ANKARA 2886

[1](#)B. ISTANBUL 0996

Classified By: Consul General Sharon A. Wiener for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Istanbul Deputy Governor responsible for minority issues told a small delegation of influential U.S.-based "Archons" of the Ecumenical Patriarchate that the vandalism recently conducted by Turkish Forestry Ministry employees on a Greek Orthodox church had been carried out in an unofficial capacity and was an accident. Not wanting to overstep his Ankara-delineated mandate, the Deputy Governor responded to the Archons' grievances concerning GOT treatment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in familiar generalities, arguing the Lausanne Treaty and inter-Orthodox disputes present challenges to resolving associated issues. Still, he expressed optimism that the government would eventually be able to take steps to address the patriarchate's concerns. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) A delegation of three "Archons" of the American Order of St. Andrew paid a call on the Istanbul Deputy Governor responsible for minority affairs, Fikret Kasapoglu, on November 30 in order to express their concerns about a host of issues affecting the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The meeting followed their November 29 trip to Ankara during which the Archons met with MFA Undersecretary Apakan and ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) Vice Chair Egemen Bagis, among others, on an identical mission (ref A). The Archons were particularly upset about the recent "vandalism" incident concerning the Greek Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration on Heybeli Island (ref B). They also raised the issues of GOT interference in the election of the Ecumenical Patriarch, the denial of legal personality to the patriarchate and the resulting inability to own property, as well as the lack of GOT recognition of the patriarchate's ecumenical title.

[1](#)3. (C) Regarding the vandalized church, Kasapoglu acknowledged he was not aware of the incident and immediately called the District Governor of the Princes Islands, Mevlut Kurban, who briefed him on the situation. Kasapoglu subsequently explained that the incident was an accident, that the forestry employees involved were working in an unofficial capacity, and that they have subsequently apologized to the patriarchate. Archon National Commander Anthony Limberakis (protect) pressed Kasapoglu on whether or not the District Governor would state publicly that the vandalism occurred unofficially, implying that the destruction was not ordered or sponsored by the state. Kasapoglu confirmed District Governor Kurban had already made such a public statement. Limberakis later told us he was pleased with this development.

¶4. (C) Though he did not directly address the Archons' grievances point by point, Kasapoglu listed a number of hurdles which he said make it difficult to address the issues associated with the patriarchate. Chief among these was Turkey's need to follow the Lausanne Treaty's requirements for the treatment of minorities. Noting the patriarchate has a "structural problem" concerning whether or not it actually represents the entire global orthodox community, Kasapoglu lamented that the influence of politics in the current orthodox world and in synod meetings present a challenge. On both points, Limberakis argued the Ecumenical Patriarchate is the "first among equals." Finally, the Deputy Governor noted that a Vatican-like institution in Turkey would violate its constitution, to which Limberakis emphasized this was not the goal of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

¶5. (C) Kasapoglu concluded that as these issues resolve themselves over time, Turkey will be able to take steps to address general patriarchate concerns. The Archons, for their part, emphasized their support for AKP, and in particular for the party's reforms and efforts to bring Turkey into the EU. They hoped the Istanbul Governorship would encourage the government to act quickly as time was running out for the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

¶6. (C) Comment. As in Ankara, the Archons had to settle for a lower level meeting in Istanbul than they had originally requested, e.g.; the Istanbul Governor who was reportedly out of town. Recognizing that officials in Ankara hold the real key to resolving their grievances, they nevertheless appeared satisfied with the substance of the cordial meeting with Kasapoglu, which followed a Feast of St. Andrew service conducted by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and attended by the Consul General. End comment.

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